

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

Special Called Council Meeting

September 7, 1978
7:00 P.M.

Council Chambers
301 West Second Street

The meeting was called to order with Mayor McClellan presiding.

Roll Call:

Present: Mayor McClellan, Mayor Pro Tem Mullen, Councilmembers Cooke, Goodman, Himmelblau, Snell, Trevino

Absent: None

Mayor McClellan opened the Special Called Meeting on the Public Hearing of the proposed 1978-79 Operating Budget. She commented that 700-800 people were in attendance in the Municipal Auditorium when the presentation was given. She felt that Council had heard a lot of the sentiment of the public at that time, and have not forgotten what they heard. Mayor McClellan advised the Chamber audience that a public hearing on contract agencies has been set for September 13, 1978 at 2:00 P.M. They will not be heard tonight. Thursday, September 21, 1978 is a public hearing in the Council Chambers for continuation of hearing on the budget. She said that the budget, according to City Charter, must be adopted by September 27, 1978 and pointed out that Council will also be holding a Work Session on the budget Saturday, September 9, beginning at 9:00 A.M. and continuing all day. "I believe," she said, "that this Council is committed to a significant reduction in the tax rate to off-set property re-evaluation and give some relief to the over-burdened property tax payers."

Reverend H.A. Neil appeared before Council and said he is with Street and Bridge. He said they received the memorandum stating that some positions will be cut, and he is interested in knowing why the cut-backs are contemplated. He said he felt that there are some salaries in Austin which are higher than those in the rest of the United States and he wants Council to know that in the part of town where he lives a loaf of bread costs more than it does in other areas; the same is true of gasoline. Mr. Neil stated he had done comparative shopping in other parts of the city and found these facts to be true.

He questioned why this can be. Reverend Neil told Council he is at the bottom of the totem pole, job-wise. He questioned why these things happen to the lower class people. In his travels to other towns in Texas he has noted that Street and Bridge is the scapegoat and he questioned why this happens.

City Manager Dan Davidson stated: "Reverend Neil and members of the Council, I would first like to state that I think we are fortunate in that the Street and Bridge is not the scapegoat in Austin. We have one of the best Street and Bridge Departments in the United States and the Council knows about that. I think the Council is aware that we have some personnel in that division that do an outstanding job. The main question you posed has to do with any possible reduction in positions. The City Council has not made any decision yet that would result in any reductions of positions within your department or any other department of the city. Now there may be some decisions like that before they adopt the budget and we will try to keep each department head of the city informed so that each of the personnel involved can keep updated on what is being proposed. But usually if the Council did adopt a budget that resulted in the reduction in the number of positions we would do our best to utilize natural attrition and so forth, as best we could, so that no individual who is on the payroll would lose their job. I can't guarantee that but that is usually the first effort Council would ask us to undertake.

"As far as the price of things in retail establishments across the city. I don't know that there is an answer to that from the Council. But it is something I think should be watched as to what you pay and other people pay for your goods and services. The Council does have before it a report on a cost of living pay increase. They did approve one last year which was comparable to what was given throughout the State of Texas. I don't believe the Council has made a decision so far this year. Finally, I'm sure the Council is happy to hear your viewpoints and I appreciate your willingness to express them."

MR. C.L. CLINE, a retiree, appeared before Council to advocate the adoption of an appraisal base lower than 75%. He said he is extremely suspicious of lopping off 15¢ off the tax rate because it will get restored next year. When he reads that tax appraisals are 25-30% higher this year than previously, he does not believe it. He said he has talked to many people and the lowest appraisal he has heard of is a 40% increase in South Austin. The appraisals of his neighbors have increased 60-100%. "Unless," he continued, "we put Mr. Klitgaard under oath, I will not accept these 25-30% increase proposals. We have been told that department heads have been told to submit 95% budgets. What is the point of that when the City Manager comes forth with 115%. You will tinker with his budget, not the department heads, so I hear. I have had a great deal of experience with administration and I know the department heads are always minor emperors and the greatest of all emperor in all Austin is our esteemed City Manager. ...I think you ought to look with exceeding care at all departmental budgets. I was astonished two days ago to learn that in addition to a city tax attorney, there are 12 assistant tax attorneys. What in God's name do they do? Do they work 40 hours a week...60 hours...? I don't know, maybe they do. This may be true, I do not know, of all departments. I simply ask Council to look at the departments and look at them carefully. Thank you very much."

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Mayor McClellan commented on the assessed valuation comments and said that to her it seems more honest to lower the tax rate so that people really know what has been done. She said that they are talking not about 15¢ but more like a 27-28¢ cut. The aim of the Council is to give a real tax reduction to a majority of the homeowners.

ADJOURNMENT

The Council adjourned its meeting at 7:30 P.M.

APPROVED

Carole Keeton McClellan
Mayor

ATTEST:

Grace Monroe
City Clerk